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Fire

372 As regards the use of fire, they have no special technique of their own. Some buy match-boxes, others borrow them from neighbours, nor is fire kept burning all day. It is only when the men go to the jungles on hunting excursions that they light a fire by the friction of wood. Their ovens did not strike us with any originality, being mud-plastered earthen affairs rising almost a cubit from the plinth, so arranged that the pots may rest on three triangular supports, the only novelty we marked being at Tikaripara, where we were shown one made of red mud, as an item of kitchen sculpture. (See illustration).

252

Santal Oven

Food

252 Boiled rice is the staple food of the Santal like
262 the rest of the neighbouring population, but there is something in the preparation that keeps the vitamins intact. It cannot be otherwise, for, the rice is "dheñki"-husked by themselves ; they do not give it a preliminary washing before pouring it into the cooking pan and allow all the water to be saturated by the grains in the process of cooking. As
262 regards the side-dishes, their neighbours and visitors indulge in their sense of humour when they refer to

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Santal food. "A Santal will manage to live where even a rat would starve," said a Missionary to Man more than seventy[1] years ago ; and wandering in the Santal lands we heard comments, "O, they will eat anything that flies except aeroplanes and anything that swims except boats."

They eat almost all the available kinds of fish and crabs and have a great relish for meat, which they preserve in a way of their own. We saw at the house of Sham Mārndi, a village Chowkidar, that a pig sacrificed during the June sowing festival was being cut to pieces, and learnt that these would be dried in the sun for three days after being mixed with salt. At the time of cooking, these pieces, soaked in water and mixed with salt and turmeric, would be placed on ovens in earthen pots. The Santal would fry the whole with "mohua" oil if available, and thereafter mix it with water and boil it for half an hour, chillies broken to pieces being added to improve the taste. Fowl is a luxury to be eaten on festive occasions and when a guest arrives in the house. It is cooked in a similar process. With an embarrassed look the Santals confessed that they eat carrion, but added that they cook it in an outer house, which implied that under the influence of Hindus they have come to look upon it as a pollution.

1 Ref. Man, *Sonthalia and the Sonthals.*

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262 lution. Added to these, many worms and insects like "Kurkuti" (*red-ant*) and "Kalei" (*termite*), the flesh of various animals like tigers, bears, crows, mice, frogs and snakes constitute their menu and suit their palate.[1]

262 252 Coming to delicacies, one comes across cakes called *lil-pitha*. A Santal matron thus taught us how to prepare it. At first "atap chal" (*sun-dried rice*) is ground to powder. Next, minute pieces of raw meat, may be pork, mutton, venison or fowl, mixed with salt and turmeric are kneaded together with the rice-powder and placed on a "sal"-leaf, while another wraps it round. The leaf-envelope is thereafter placed on red-hot charcoal or on a pan, and thus baked. The cake is shaped like a circular "chapati" (*Indian bread*) and cut to pieces when served to guests on ceremonial occasions. They are never kept over, and one must, as the lady of the house explained, eat them on the same day of the preparation. A second cake of their domestic confectionary has the onomatopoeic name of "chòr pitha" because of the cracking hiss it makes on pans during the frying process. Sun-dried rice is ground, mixed with water, made into a thick fluid and then fried like an omelette with "mohua" oil. A third cake,

1 Ref. *Mayurbhanj Census Report*, 1931, Vol. I, p. 192.

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"dumbu pitha," is shaped like eggs with powdered rice, treacle and salt. It was explained to us that in the process of baking an earthen pot has to be placed on an oven with water. The cake is then placed on a miniature bamboo basket and simmered in steam.

Various kinds of edible leaves are eaten by the Santals, among them "Siñ aṛak'" (A small tree, *Bauhinia Purpurea*, Linn., the leaves of which are eaten as a pot-herb), "Purai aṛak'," (Beng. Pui sang, *Basella Alba*, Linn.) "Kedok' aṛak'" (The supper pot-herb, *Argyreia speciosa*, Sweet; Oriya, Kendo sang), "Maṭha aṛak'" (A pot-herb, *Antidesma Diandrum*, Tulas; Oriya, *Khata*) and "Mungà aṛak'" (Horse-radish leaves, *Moringa pterygosperma*, Gaertn.) deserve mention. These are generally boiled in water and eaten with salt, and as an occasional luxury fried with "mohua" oil. The Santal, we learnt, has no relish for mustard oil, the favourite culinary recipe of the Bengalis. Besides, they eat various kinds of flowers like "mohua," (*Bassia Latifolia*), Horse-radish (Bengali, *sajina*), "Kohṇḍa baha" (pumpkin flower, *Cucurbita moschata*, *Duchsne*) fried with "mohua" oil when available, or boiled simply in water. They do not use spices or even turmeric in the preparation of these flower dishes, the exception being garlic, onion and pepper.

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262 252 Another article of food, called "Hàṇḍuà," prepared from the young shoots of the bamboo is relished by them. We learn that when the shoots of the bamboo are a foot or so above the ground they are gathered and taken home. They are then cut into thin slices and ground in the "ḍheñki" (*husking implement*) into a kind of flour. This flour is put into a pot, the air being excluded, and [251] allowed to stand for three days. It is then taken out and spread upon a flat stone and dried. It is then "hàṇḍuà" and is used to make "utu" (*relish*) and "bhàrtà" (*chutney*).[1]

262 252 137 Among fruits eaten raw, "Ul" (mango), ripe "Matkòm" (Beng. *Mohua* ; *Bassia Latifolia*), ripe "Kaṇṭhaṛ" (jack-fruit, *Artocarpus Integrifolia*, Linn.), ripe figs (Santali, *Loa* ; the fruit of *Ficus glomerata*, Roxb.), "Banyan fruit" (*Ficus Bengalensis*, Roxb ; Santali, *Bare*), "Terel" (*Kendu*, Oriya, Beng. *Gab* ; *Diospyros Tomentosa*), "Tarop" (Charkuli, Oriya; *Buchanania latifolia*), "Kankuri" [(Oriya Cucumber; *Cucumis sativus*, Linn.)] and "Bhurudu" (Santali for a jungle produce, *Gardenia S.P.*) deserve mention.

Fruits also constitute items in kitchen delicacies and green-mangoes (*Mangifera Indica*), tamarind (*Tamarindus Indica*), the peel of the "mohua" fruit,

1 Ref.: Dr. Campbell's *Santali to English Dictionary*, p. 234.

3t Mukherjea O. Y-4,5 (ca. 1933-1939) 1962
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boiled in water and mixed with salt and turmeric, serve as sauces in the Santal dinner.

We have already got some idea about the Santal use of "mohua" oil in cooking. This oil, they massage also over their bodies, but after and not before their daily ablution, as is the custom with some Hindus. Like the rest of the world, they delight in a smoke of tobacco. We have already noticed the preparation of the "pungi", the Santal cigarette, called also *chuti* in the Santal Parganas. This is, we were told, men's monopoly, the women smoking only occasionally. But raw tobacco, mixed with lime in the form of "khaini" (*Hindi*) is chewed frequently by both men and women as a perpetual stimulant.

No review of the material background of Santal life will be complete without a reference to their domestic animals. Cows, buffaloes, sheep and goats meet your eyes in the cattle-yard; pigs grunt, geese cackle and fowls flutter about mixed up with pigeons flying down from their improvised nests inside earthen pitchers suspended from roofs.

Drink

"Give me rice-beer, or give me death," may be the summary of a Santal's instinctive craving for

3i Mukherjea O. Y-4, 6 (ca. 1933-1939) 1902
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796 614 [782] [252] then offered to the gods to protect the clan from earthly maladies, bowel-complaints being specially named as a dreaded disease. The meat, thereafter, is cooked with salt and water. The *Màrṇḍis* must eat the heads of the animals sacrificed and the rest goes to the share of the invited.

The *Baskes*, when questioned, said that they need not like *Màrṇḍis* start the festival before sunrise; any time before noon suits their clan calendar. [782] [252] Their sacrificial meat is cooked with turmeric, spices and salt, and their gods are similiar to those of the *Màrṇḍis*.

796 *Pata* (Santal *Còròk* in mid-April).

[177] We have seen from the foregoing that the Santals, in addition to their orthodox festivals, associate themselves with the various Hindu ceremonials like the *Durga Puja*, *Kali Puja* and others. [174] From the evidence at our disposal, one cannot be sure as to when they began their association, but as one looks to the *Pata*, the Santal version of Hindu *Còròk*, (Hook-swinging festival) it seems to be pretty old. In the chapter on *Bitlàhà* or Santal social ostracism, we noticed that the final trial of the offenders takes place on *Pata cando*, meaning the month of *Còròk*, and the orthodox meaning of the word *Pata* is stated to be "a festival in honour of *Mahadeo*."

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342 ventilation except a few holes high up on the wall. In front of the house the eaves of the roof are elongated which serves as a covered verandah. The floor of the house is a little raised above the ground, being filled up with earth. This is trampled down hard and made smooth with mud mixed with cowdung.

342 778 769 [609] [784] Every Santal house in which the head of the family lives has a 'Bhitar'. This is a part of a room partitioned by a low wall which runs out from the side wall some six to nine feet into the compartment. It is a kind of stall, and is sacred to the ancestors. Here food is kept for the ancestors and no stranger is permitted inside. The married daughter of the house, who in her girlhood was allowed entry is now not permitted inside, because she now belongs to another family and might cause religious pollution.

343 231 There is a separate shed for cattle. Within this shed in some houses special arrangement is made to keep pigs. In one corner of the cattle-shed two mud-walls about three feet in height are built, to form a small rectangular sty. Over it bamboo sticks and branches of trees are placed, so that pigs cannot escape by jumping. A hole is made in one of the walls and bamboo sticks are placed there in such a way that by raising these sticks the pigs can easily come out and enter. But in some villages in the Godda Damin are found the pig-sheds built outside the house. In this case the walls of about 5 feet and the roof are made of thatch.

342 • 252 351 [407] Inside the house on the verandah the "Dhenk"[1] (rice-husker) is fixed and a mill-stone is kept. Except during cold season, when the inside is warm, the Santals generally stay outside on the courtyard both day

[1] [Erratum: this should read "'Dhenki'". Cf. errata sheet, category 116, p. ix -- Analyst]

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and night. As a rule they cook their food outside, but always have a fire-place inside. During the cold season they generally cook their food inside, the result being that the house specially at night, is suffocatingly full of smoke and every thing becomes covered with soot. This does not, however, seem to affect the Santals much. In the bed-room they store their rice and all other belongings, and the fowls are kept too in that room at night. It is, of course, not possible to keep such a house clean, even if they tried to do so.

Agriculture :—The Santals before becoming agriculturists were probably in the hunting stage. Still, nothing pleases them so much as to be out for hunting, they even now observe the "Dehiri hunting", which is an annual hunt. During the time of the annual hunt the Dehiri priest performs certain ceremonies to propitiate "Sin Bonga" to avert calamity during hunting. All these suggest that prior to becoming agriculturists the Santals were in the hunting stage. At present the Santals are typical agriculturists. There is no authentic record when the Santal first started tilling the soil. Rev. Bodding in his memoir, "How the Santals live" has mentioned their first attempt at cultivation in the following words :—

"It is just possible that one of their first attempts to get something out of the soil may have been something like what is now called 'kurau', a mode of cultivation that is said to have been used also by Santals in former years, but is not practised by them at the present time, so far as is known. It is, however, still kept up by the Paharias living on the hills of the Santal country. A piece of jungle is cut down high up

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FOOD

262 The Santals eat almost everything. They generally live on vegetable diet because they cannot afford to eat meat often, but when they get meat they eat too much. Their staple food is rice which is 252 262 prepared in the following way. They put rice into an earthen vessel containing a sufficient amount of water and is boiled, a plate is put on the top of vessel to keep the steam within, which causes the mass to be evenly cooked.

Besides boiled rice, the Santals eat parched rice which they call 'Khajari'. They put some sand in a broken or shallow earthen vessel and place it over the fire-place. They sprinkle some salted water on the rice which is to be fried, and mix it properly. Some of the rice they then place over the heated sand and stir it with a few broom sticks of coconut leaves. When [263] the rice properly swells, they take it out of the sand, and eat it smeared with mustard oil or with molasses.

From rice they prepare cake, the local name of which is 'Pitha'. They have got a large number of varieties. Rev. P. O. Bodding in his memoir on "How Santals Live" has given a detailed description of all the varieties. A few I am quoting here from his writing :-

"JEL PITHA", meat cake. Sun-dried paddy is husked and cleaned, soaked in water for a little while, then dried and made into a coarse flour and sifted. [263] The flesh is cut into small bits. Turmeric, pepper and other spices and salt are ground fine. All is well kneaded and mixed into the flour, that has been moistened. The whole is then pressed down on a leaf-plate. Another leaf-plate is with the help of

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strawpins fixed on as a cover. The whole is placed into a fire-place, where there are live coals, and on the top more live coals are put. When ready the whole is taken out and eaten. This is much relished. The flesh used is mostly that of pigs or of fowls, also of sacrificed animals. 252 262

'KHAPRA PITHA', made from rice flour. The flour is made into a batter with water, nothing being added, except sometimes a little salt. Some batter is put into a shallow earthenware dish (karahe) a little oil being rubbed on the batter to prevent it from sticking to the dish. An earthenware lid is pressed down on the batter; and the dish is then put on the fire-place and fried. When ready fried, the karahe is taken off and turned, so that the cake falls out, and fresh batter is put in. This pitha is fairly large. Khapra is the Santal name for a roofing tile or a large potshered.

'OL PITHA', mushroom cake, prepared like jel pitha, with mushrooms instead of flesh or meat. If the opening of the fire-place is small, a large potshered is placed on the fire. When this is sufficiently heated, the patra (leaf plate) with its contents is placed on this. When baked on the underside, the whole is turned over with a twig to get the other side baked.

The Santals cultivate pulses of different varieties in their field. These pulses they boil in water and mix with turmeric, spices and salt. When it becomes semi-liquid they take it off the fire. This cooked pulse is called 'dal', and is taken with boiled rice. [244]

Following are the pulses which are commonly eaten by the Santals. 262

(1) Arhar (Cajanus indicus spreng).

(2) Khesari (Lathyrus Sativus L.)

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(3) Mug (Phaseolus Mungo Linn.).

(4) Musuri (Lens esculanta Moench.).

262 263 252 The Santals prepare curry with different vegetables which they collect from the jungle or they produce in their own kitchen garden. Potato is rarely used by them. From the jungle they collect certain edible roots, leaves and mushrooms, and with them they prepare curry. Pumpkins, sweet potato, brinjals, jhinga, ladies finger, beans, radishes, and onions are used by the Santals for curry.

262 The Santals eat various types of fruits, the most common are the followings :- jack fruit, guava, plantain, black berry, tamarind, papaw, etc.

The Santals relish animal food very much. They eat the meat of almost all birds and animals with the exception of tiger, leopard, horse, monkey, dog, mole, eagle, hawk, some types of frog, elephant and cat. They are very fond of the meat of pig, young crow, mouse, and hare.

231 They kill pigs in the following way:-

252 They let out their dogs to catch a pig which runs hither and thither on being frightened. They then shoot arrows at the pig. When it falls on the ground, they strike it on its head with a big stone. After it dies, they burn it in the fire, and when all the hair of its body is burnt, they cut it into pieces and cook it.

252 262 Birds are similarly treated to remove the feathers. Fishes are eaten mostly as curry. Now coming in 262 contact with the Hindus of the neighbouring areas, the 177 Santals have ceased to eat meat of many animals.

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258 through the vertical post at the other end. Then they press together the two logs by placing another solid piece of wood crosswise over the upper log parallel to the wooden cleat which is fitted in the vertical post. With the help of these two, the logs are pressed together. Now-a-days the Santals supply the seeds and fruits to the Teli (oil men) and get oil in return. Besides using this oil for curry preparation they use oil in anointing, lubricating, for medicinal purposes and for lighting lamps.

[178] [252] [302] [357] [372]

How the Santals Prepare Pachawe (rice beer) :- The Santals drink Handi in large quantities. Young boys and girls, old men and women all drink Handi. Their method of preparing (rice beer) handi is as follows :- The first thing is to make a pot, with a large mouth called *tukuc*. The *tukuc* is filled with dry leaves or straw and set on the fire, they do it outside the house in the open as there is much smoke. This is done in the morning when they are to start brewing. When the *tukuc* becomes cool, it is cleaned. Then in the afternoon, they take ordinary rice and roast this a little. The roasting is said to give a certain flavour to the beer. Thereupon the rice is boiled and after that spread out to dry. The quantity of rice used for one brew varies from four to six paos (one pao is quarter of a seer). When the rice is fairly dry it is mixed with some vegetable fermenting stuff called Bakhar.[1] Very often certain vegetable matter is added to the Bakhar to make the beer intoxicating. When the rice and

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[804]

1. Bakhar is a small round white thing which the Santals buy in the market. It is prepared by mixing hundred kinds of roots of trees and creepers with the powder of rice.

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and it is conducted according to the provision of the Indian Christian Marriage Act.

Material Culture. Material culture of the Santals of the Santal parganas has not much changed. They now wear cotton dhuties, shirts and gangees and the women have accepted cotton saris which are used by the Hindus. The well-to-do Christian Santals wear European dress, *i.e.* coats, pants, shirts, socks and shoes. The christian women wear Saris, blouses and petti coat according to the Hindu style.

Some of the younger men and women of the Christian community go out for employment in the towns and cities and when they come back they display their superior material culture, such as fountain pen, wristwatches and other luxury goods.

Rice beer is their important drink but the Christian missionaries make propaganda in favour of total abstinence, and the Christian Santals are gradually giving up this habit and tea is being substituted for it. Machine made cigarettes are slowly coming into use.

In the preparation of rice it seems they have copied something from the Bengali Hindus. The Santals like the Bengalis use boiled rice for their food and unboiled rice for offering to their tribal deities.

The indigenous husking machine of the Santals is mortar and pestle, but they also use husking lever (dhenki) in husking rice which they have copied from their Hindu neighbours.

The Santals, when they speak among themselves, use their own language. But with the 'Dikhus' in the Santal Parganas they speak in broken Hindi and

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and legends of Hinduism. The linguistic evidence shows how their material culture has been vitally affected and has some bearing on the more elusive realm of thought and belief. The grammatical structure of Santali has little in common with that of the Indo-Aryan tongues. It is an agglutinative and not an inflectional language. There have, however, been large and extensive borrowings of words. An instructive example can be taken from their method of husking rice. The term *ḍhinki*, used for a foot-pedal rice husker, has been borrowed from Bengali, and a *ḍhinki* is found in almost every home. The rice that is husked at the time of making sacrifices must be prepared in the home of the village priest, and in its preparation the use of the older and more primitive *ukhuṛ* is obligatory. This is a wooden mortar in which the rice is husked by hand with a wooden pestle, or *tok*. Both these words are Austro-Asiatic in origin. It is likely that when the household adopted the new method of husking rice the tribe did not change over from the old method of husking the sacred rice for fear of a loss in efficacy. One reason given is that as the *ḍhinki* is operated by the foot, rice husked in the *ḍhinki* is unclean and so unfit for offering to the spirits. It may be that the association of a mortar and pestle with sexual symbolism enhanced its magical value. The symbolism in this case is familiar to the Santal mind, for one way of expressing differences of sex is to refer to boys as "pestles" and to girls as "mortars". The *ukhuṛ* has to be used by the medicine man in preparing remedies; it is also used at marriages, when the feet of the bridegroom's party are washed over an *ukhuṛ*, and an *ukhuṛ* filled with water is required during the death ceremonies. In Bengal the rice which forms the daily food of the people is boiled before husking, and the Santals follow the same method in preparing it; but the rice used in sacrifices, *aḍua caole*, is never so treated, being dried in the sun.

Among their domestic animals, the fowl, the dog and the goat have non-Bengali names, while the names for pigeons, sheep, pigs and, most important of all, their cattle are borrowed. Fowls, goats and pigs are all used in their sacrifices. In the realm of wild life the Santal has found little need to borrow a vocabulary from his neighbours. Wild animals, birds, trees and shrubs, many fish and insects, also snakes, have Santali names. The same is true of most of the weapons used in hunting. Although the term for paddy is Santal, the names of all the implements now used in rice cultivation and the terms for the

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sand on the pathways becomes unbearably hot for our feet. Pigs were killed at dawn, cut, and the meat was roasted first thing so that it would be ready when the people returned home. The day turned out to be very warm. Some men went into the village of G—— because of their thirst to get a drink of beer, and they said: 'One pice worth of beer from G—— is as good as six pice of beer from that other place.' " The market is the main shopping centre for the villagers. There are cloth stalls and stalls of imported trinkets and ornaments. Potters, weavers, blacksmiths, purveyors of "medicines" and many others display their wares. The Santals may have grain for sale in a good year; they sell fowls and vegetables and buy their salt and cooking oil regularly, with other commodities at need. The market is a great place for the exchange of gossip, for meeting friends and relatives; it is here that many flirtations begin and matches are set in hand.

Nevertheless, the main business of the Santals' life, round which most of their activities centre, is to wrest from the poor soil the greatest possible amount of food. The struggle leaves little time for philosophizing, but they do sometimes crystallize in a phrase some bitter lesson from experience, as when they say: "Rain in the morning, like a friendship that is easily made, does not last." They work as hard as their social obligations allow. There is nothing distinctive in their methods of agriculture, and for generations they have been accustomed to settled cultivation and the use of the plough. The division of labour between men and women, the taboo against women handling the plough, they share with the surrounding culture. They observe the same propitious days and seasons for sowing and reaping as their neighbours. A great authority on the Santals has said:[1] "They are on their way to becoming agriculturalists, but are, as yet, far behind. . . . They have not as yet learnt the need for and the benefits of weeding and manuring, or of changing the crops, and much more. For example, they do not take proper care of their cattle. These are mostly herded by children, who use much of the time for their own games and pleasures. When the paddy is harvested, the cattle are permitted to roam about. A direct result of this is that it is impossible for people to have any crops standing after the middle of December or thereabouts; the cattle would

[1] P. O. Bodding, *Studies in Santal Medicine and Connected Folklore*, Pt. III, "How the Santals live", *Memoirs of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Calcutta, 1940, Vol. X, No. 3, p. 434.